

Sites of county significance include the array of natural features in the county, ranging from sandhills vegetation, to mill ponds, to creek floodplains, to Carolina bays. In fact, there are probably a number of other Carolina bays within the county of at least County significance, but not surveyed due to lack of access or time. Needless to say, quite a few other sites could have been identified of County significance, given more time and effort.

Natural Communities

General Comments

A natural community is defined by the NC NHP as a “distinct and reoccurring assemblage of populations of plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi naturally associated with each other and their physical environment” (Schafale and Weakley 1990). In this inventory, most of the significant natural areas were identified on the basis of natural communities, rather than on the basis of rare plant or rare animal locations and habitats. Unlike plant and animal species, however, natural communities can be “in the eye of the beholder”. They are not distinct entities clearly demarcated from other communities. Different ecologists classify communities in different ways, some by the dominant species (such as trees), other by topography, soils, and other factors. Even once a classification has been agreed upon, different biologists may interpret the same piece of land as different communities! In addition, communities are significant mainly in a rather mature condition, and some might not be recognizable immediately after being logged. Some communities require active burning to be maintained. Long periods of fire suppression (such as 50 years or more) may “convert” one natural community type to another.

Natural communities constantly “transition” with others, especially where the topography is steep or where soil and rock types vary in close proximity. A steep slope may have three or four natural communities arranged from the base of the slope to the top of the slope. In other cases, communities may blend, such that features of at least two communities can be seen on the same piece of ground. For example, small streams that occur in the Neuse River floodplain (a brownwater floodplain) generally carry little sediment, and are probably blackwater streams. Yet, the natural communities along such streams are often a blending of blackwater and brownwater communities.

Approximately 25 types of natural communities are identified in this inventory for Scotland County (see Table 2), based on the types, subtypes, and variants described in Schafale and Weakley (1990) and Schafale (in prep.). However, several of these are marginal-quality examples or represent uncertain identification. This is a respectable number of communities for a small-sized county, in part because the county contains both Sandhills and non-Sandhills communities in the Coastal Plain.

The following is a brief overview of the natural communities found in Scotland County. Detailed descriptions of the vegetation typical for a given community can be found in Schafale